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SUBJECT: COMMISSION ON STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW) 2009 SESSION

¶11. (U) Summary and Action Request. The Commission on the Status of Women held its annual two-week session from March 2-13, 2009. The new positions of the U.S. were well received, Agreed Conclusions were adopted by consensus, an annual resolution on Palestinian women was adopted by a vote of 30-3(US)-8, and the themes for the next 5 years were chosen. The U.S. might wish to volunteer to be the WEOG member of the Working Group on Communications. Action request contained in paragraph 9. End summary.

Atmospherics

¶12. (U) The U.S. statement, delivered by head of delegation Meryl Frank, was warmly welcomed by the NGO community as well as by other delegations. (Full text can be found at the USUN website as press release 38 at http://www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov/press_releases/20090304_038.html.) The common refrain the delegation heard repeatedly during CSW was "it's good to have the U.S. back again", indicating the value placed on U.S. leadership in the multinational arena by interlocutors, UN officials and NGOs based in the U.S. and elsewhere. Nearly 2000 NGO representatives, as well as dozens of Ministers of Women's Affairs, and delegations from capitals, packed the standing-room-only hall for the opening events. Many delegations pointed out the impact of the global economic crisis on women, a topic which was probed during a panel discussion. The U.S. delegation consisted of Meryl Frank, Judy Gold, Ellen Chesler, Felice Gaer, and Beth Brooke, in addition to working level experts.

¶13. (U) Ambassador Susan Rice took part in two events on the margins of CSW: a ministerial-level meeting hosted by Deputy Secretary-General Migiro regarding the reform proposals for a new gender architecture entity (septel), as well as a panel discussion organized by the mission of Afghanistan on the continuing problems faced by Afghan women. The delegation's three question-and-answer sessions with U.S.-based NGOs to discuss the positions of the new U.S. administration towards women's issues were warmly greeted by over 100 NGO representatives at each of the three sessions, who expressed their pleasure that the new Administration is supporting key landmarks for gender equality such as the Beijing Declaration and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Agreed Conclusions

¶14. (U) Agreed Conclusions on the priority theme -- "The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS" -- were adopted by consensus after round-the-clock negotiations that nearly broke down Friday afternoon. Time constraints and delay tactics by Cuba, Venezuela, Syria and Iran, more than serious substantive differences, led to a frenzied atmosphere. Eventually, the facilitator (Armenia) stepped in to broker last-minute deals on a consensus package. Although the U.S. supported proposed strong language on comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, the wording in the final text was little different than previously. Our efforts to strengthen the text were greatly appreciated by NGOs, Europeans and other partners. The final text included references to sex education and the need to

review laws that discriminate against women, proposed by the U.S., as well as references to international cooperation and the global economic crisis, proposed by Cuba.

Working Group on Communications

15. (U) The chair of the CSW's Working Group (WG) on Communications, South Korea, attempted to strengthen the mandate of the WG, but was stymied by opposition from China, Russia, Cuba, Iran and others. The original function of the WG, to review communications by women to other human rights bodies (HRC, CEDAW, etc.) alleging violations of their human rights, and to discern trends among the types of violations reported, has been thwarted by an insufficient number of communications. Rather than requesting human rights bodies to share their communications with the Working Group, the consensus resolution merely decided to "continue to raise awareness of the existing mandate of the communications mechanism of the Commission, as appropriate," and to remain seized of the matter.

16. (U) During discussions on the meager number of communications before it, no substantive discussion of any women's rights violations took place, aside from an attempt by Cuba to embarrass the United States over a visa issue related to wives of prisoners in Guantanamo. No WEOG member state stepped forward to join the 5-person Working Group for the two-year term 2009-2011. USUN suggests that L/HRR may wish to nominate one of its attorneys to represent WEOG on the WG, bringing to bear the clout of the U.S. as well as expertise on legal issues, to try to revitalize the Working Group and make it a more effective body.

U.S. Side Event on HIV/AIDS

17. (U) Assistant U.S. Global Aids Coordinator Michele Moloney-Kitts

participated in a U.S.-sponsored public affairs panel entitled "Integrating Gender into a Locally-Owned HIV/AIDS Response" held on March 12 on the margins of CSW. In addition to Ms. Moloney-Kitts, other panelists included Ambassador Charles Thembani Ntwaagae of Botswana; Ms. Jacqueline Otega, Director of the Women's Mobilization Program with Religions for Peace; and Ms. Faith Meitiaki, representing UNICEF's Working Group on Girls and the Anglican Women's Empowerment Consultative Council. The event was moderated by Dr. Lynn Collins, Technical Advisor with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The discussion focused on how host countries are integrating gender issues into prevention, care and treatment programs. Participants underscored the critical need to address the inequalities between women and men that influence sexual behavior, as well as the norms that put both women and men at higher risk of infection and create barriers to accessing HIV/AIDS services. This side event demonstrated the new Administration's commitment to providing international assistance to communities heavily impacted by HIV/AIDS.

Annual resolutions

18. (U) The annual resolution on the situation of Palestinian women was adopted by a vote of 30-3(US)-8. The UK and Netherlands joined the U.S. in voting against, while Belgium, Spain, Sweden, Croatia, Germany, Cameroon, Republic of Korea and Japan abstained. The EU's attempts to persuade the Palestinian delegation to phase out this resolution over the next year or two failed. The U.S. gave an Explanation of Vote underlining the one-sided nature of the resolution, and the inappropriate politicization of the CSW by singling out only one country situation to the exclusion of all others. The U.S. co-sponsored the SADC resolution on Women, the Girl Child and HIV/AIDS. Resolutions on Preparations for the fifty-fourth session, on Future Organization and Methods of Work, and on the Future Operation of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) were adopted by consensus.

Future Themes

19. (U) The consensus resolution on the future methods of work of the CSW spelled out the following themes for upcoming discussions:

-2010: Review of Beijing and Beijing plus five and Gender Perspective towards the MDGs;

-2011: Girls and Education, Training, Science and Technology;

-2012: Rural Women;

-2013: Violence against Women;

-2014: MDG implementation for Women and Girls;

The modalities for the Beijing plus 15 in 2010 meeting will be negotiated by member states over the next several months. We will need to decide on whether to have an Outcome Document, what type of Outcome, the number of panels and plenary meetings, and the level of participation of NGOs. Detailed summaries of all discussions during the two-week session of the Commission can be found on-line at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/53sess.htm>

¶110. ACTION REQUEST: Department please indicated whether L/HRR will nominate a member to represent WEOG on the Working Group on Communications, as described in paragraphs 4 and 5 above.

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